



Early Chapters in Hull Methodism.



By the same Author.



SPEECH OF HOLDERNESS.



“Carefully put together, and I hope
you will continue your work.”

PROFESSOR MAX MÜLLER, 1890.

EARLY CHAPTERS
— IN —
HULL METHODISM.
1746—1800.

BY
W. H. THOMPSON.

“How is this town changed since I preached on the Carr.”
Wesley’s Journal, 1774.

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PREFACE.

THE following notices of Early Hull Methodism were originally contributed to the local Wesleyan Record. These sketches were so favourably received, that we have been encouraged to put them into more extended and permanent form; the story being well worth the telling. Introduced here about 1746, only some seven years after the formation of the first of John Wesley's societies, Methodism has long reckoned Hull as one of its strongholds. On Mr. Wesley's death, it was from this town that the whole question was raised, as to whether or not, Methodism was to remain a mere auxiliary of the Established Church. An epoch marking event this, fraught with issues of the highest importance in ecclesiastical history.

At this advanced period it is altogether idle to discuss too curiously Mr. Wesley's own theoretical views concerning the great movement of which he was the founder, and the apparent

want of harmony between his later practices, and the earlier expressions of his creed. Our "father" might aptly be likened unto that bold Genoese of the fifteenth century, who sailed out into the unknown west, seeking the golden Orient, by the pathway of the setting sun. God led him whither he knew not. Columbus never realised to the end of his days, the magnificent character, and true significance of that new world, to which he had opened the way. To him it was the old world still—the western India. And so John Wesley, the pioneer, under God's providence, of one of the most remarkable movements in the annals of Christendom, despite the catholicity of his life, in theory never quite escaped from the limitations of his earlier pre-conceptions and training. To him Methodism remained largely the old church still. To his followers, however, for good or ill, it was altogether a wider place whither he had led them.

W. H. T.

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CHAPTER I.

John Wesley's First Visit to Hull, 1752.



WE wish to picture the town of Hull as it appeared in 1752, the year that marked John Wesley's first visit.

A century and a half ago, we may commence by remarking, the "King's Town" had but few points in common, so far at least as outward aspect was concerned, with the Hull we know to-day. Stretching in every possible direction far beyond its olden boundaries, our ancient port now presents very little to remind one of its historic past. In most respects it is essentially a modern town. Until later than the middle of last century, however, it was distinctly otherwise. From con-
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temporary prints and descriptions, we learn that Hull was to all intents a mediæval burgh, whose population clustered within moated walls. Beverley gate, where stout Sir John Hotham had refused admission to Charles the First, and the other gateways were yet most of them standing. Outside the walls, which on the west and north ran nearly parallel with the present Humber, Prince's and Queen's Docks; and beyond the River Hull to the eastward, there were few, scarcely any, houses.

Imagine such an old-world maritime town, whose only harbour was still the narrow stream which had served it during the middle ages; whose fortifications were falling into decay; surrounded by low-lying carr-lands; with a Ruysdael-like landscape, dotted here and there with quaint Dutch-looking windmills, where there are to-day miles of densely populated streets; and the reader has a tolerably correct view of Hull, as it appeared when Wesley came to it on his earliest evangelical visit, one April day in the year 1752.

What at that period was its social and moral condition? Turn to the pages of Smollett, and you

there will find, painted with Hogarth realism, in touches coarse and yet masterly, what was the life of a seaport town during the reign of George the Second. Suffice it to say, that in such a centre were emphasised many of the worst traits of an age which itself was irreligious, drunken, and profligate beyond description.* Foulness of speech was as prevalent as coarseness of behaviour. Mr. Wesley tells us how, on one of his earliest visits to Hull, he crossed the Humber with two boatmen, such "brutes" as he had seldom seen. Their blasphemy and stupid gross obscenity, he states, were beyond all he "had ever heard." And that was saying a good deal in the eighteenth century.

Duller life mayhap had become, but no whit more decent nor moral was it all over the country, than in the wicked days of the Restoration. The first two Georges, as debauched as Charles the Second himself, and incomparably more gross and stupid, set the example which their loyal subjects

* As far back as the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1574) special steps had to be taken by the authorities in Hull to punish the excessive lewdness of a certain section of the populace; no less a dignitary than the Archbishop of York being consulted as to the suppression of the evil.

failed not to follow. Perhaps no clearer light can be thrown on the essentially brutal character of the populace of those days than that which is afforded by Mr. Wesley's own Journals and the Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers, and the treatment they received. Again, it speaks volumes for the spirit of the age that George the Third should have elevated Porteous to the bench of bishops, his claim to that distinction being, that he had written a poem on the occasion of the death of George the Second, in which he said the reason why that monarch had to die was, that it was necessary to remove him to Heaven that he might be the right man in the right place. Such a saint as George the Second!

Not but that there was in Hull, as elsewhere, a salt of Puritanism to be found. That peripatetic rhymers, Taylor, the Water Poet, who visited the town in 1622, in the curious work entitled "A very Merry-Wherry Ferry Voyage," wherein he recounts his local experiences, says:

. . . . I there was told
 Not one recusant all the towne doth hold,
 Nor (as they say) there's not a Puritan,
 Or any nose-wise fools precisian.

So Master John Taylor may have been informed, but we very much distrust his information. True or not true, however, in his day, we know that when Wesley first came to Hull, there were two or three, at least, quite old established dissenting congregations here. The ancient Dagger Lane society,* now removed to a more modern part of the town, was founded in 1643 ; whilst the Bowlalley Lane church had its beginnings in the persecuting times of Charles the Second. The first minister of the latter, indeed, was one of the evicted clergymen under the Act of Uniformity, and suffered also six months' imprisonment at a later period in Hull for his non-conformity. And by the middle of the eighteenth century we do not suppose the sturdy Puritan spirit was altogether dead. Furthermore, and apart from these, there was a little Methodist society, which had already been in existence in the town some time. But of this, more anon.

Early in 1752, our " father " had been visiting Grimsby. Hitherto, although he had been engaged in his great missionary work for several years, he

* The present Spring Bank Presbyterian Church.

had never embraced, so far as we can ascertain, our town in any of his itineraries. Journeying from Lincolnshire, then, and crossing the Humber, he now approached it for the first time.

Wesley was a man of a keenly observant mind. He was no mere dreamy enthusiast, so utterly absorbed in the concerns of another world as to be altogether oblivious to the needs of the present. Quite the contrary; no individual of his day was more intensely practical. And this is well illustrated by the notes in his "Journal," wherein he records his impressions respecting Hull at that period. What particularly struck him was the defective state of the fortifications. "I was quite surprised at the miserable condition of the fortifications," he writes, "far more decayed than those at Newcastle, even before the rebellion." He goes on to add that "it was well no enemy was near."*

From Wesley's narrative it almost looks as though news of his impending visit had been somewhat widely spread, for, reaching the town by water,

* Gent in 1733 writes, referring to the same point, "'Tis pity its fortifications should have been neglected, and suffered to lie in ruins."

he speaks of the quay being crowded with people, inquiring, "which is he, which is he?" They for the time, however, left him alone; they stared and laughed, but he was allowed to pass unmolested to his friend's house. We presume he would arrive at the Southend landing place, which was at the east end of the present Humber Street, and thence probably passed through the low arch which still pierces some antique tenements, and leads into Blackfriargate. This thoroughfare (now called Little Lane) was formerly the entrance into the town from the river, and within its narrow portals King Henry the Eighth, Catherine Howard, and their brilliant suite must have passed. In the afternoon Mr. Wesley went to prayers at Holy Trinity Church, which he characterises with truth "a grand and venerable structure." We Hull townfolk, Churchmen and Dissenters alike, do well to be proud of it. One of the largest parish churches in all England, it towers above the town of Hull, a bold object against the flat East Yorkshire landscape. Dating from about the close of the thirteenth century, the edifice is a most

interesting example of the Decorated and Perpendicular styles. Not only attractive from an architectural point of view, it is also rich in associations both of pre-Reformation times as well as a later period. Its history is the history of the town, and it shares in the memories of some of Hull's noblest names, from the De la Poles downward. The vicar at this date was an estimable man, the Rev. William Mason, the father of Mason the poet.* In the evening Mr. Wesley preached on Myton Carr—unenclosed lands, which stretched away from the town in the direction of what is now called Pottery, in fact, partly included in that district at the present day. Here then it was, about half-a-mile from the walls, probably not far from the site of the Great Thornton Street Chapel, and adjacent to where the town gallows stood, he delivered his first sermon, on the text, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world

*For the latter and his poetry Mr. Wesley had a genuine admiration. Comparing him with Gray in one place he speaks of Mason being as "full as good a poet; and over and above possessed of that modesty and humanity, wherein Mr. Gray was so greatly deficient." Personally, however, we think Wesley's literary criticism in this case will not bear examination.

and lose his own soul?" He says it was to a "large multitude, rich and poor, horse and foot, with several coaches." *

We can sketch the scene. A vast concourse of people, gathered not from Hull alone, but from all the surrounding country-side. The news of the famous preacher's coming, we may imagine, had spread like wildfire far and near, and in the throng there were folk of all sorts and conditions. Farmers and agricultural labourers from neighbouring Holderness; sea-faring men whose ships were in port; staid High-street merchants, with their well-dressed wives and daughters; perhaps a sprinkling of the East Yorkshire gentry; respectable town tradesmen, with their spouses; add to these a sprinkling of Hull ruffianism, and you will form a tolerable conception of the audience.

What about the preacher? A spare, slimly-built man, rather below the medium stature, about fifty years of age, with delicately-moulded, yet striking features, of a slightly ascetic sort. Calm

* Myton Carr, enclosed in 1771, extended on both sides of the present Anlaby Road as far as Wold Carr—*vide* Mr. Travis-Cook's "*Manor of Myton*."

in manner, and composed in speech and delivery ; not one—the casual observer might have thought—like the impassioned Whitfield, to sway and move a mighty multitude. So, indeed, some who heard him for this, the first time, might have fancied. But listen and watch. “What shall it profit a man?” And as gradually the preacher kindles to his theme, note the effect of his words upon his hearers. “Thousands,” he states, “gave serious attention.” We can picture the merchant, hitherto absorbed in buying and selling, and getting of gold ; the farmer, with no other thoughts but his stock, and his fields, and his crops ; the tradesman, with his shop and customers ; the good housewife, wrapped up in her home concerns. How Mr. Wesley’s words must have come upon them as a thunderbolt from heaven, in those days when plain and faithful preaching so seldom was heard !

There were others, however, besides thoughtful hearers, in the gathering. A rabble, such as for years dogged his steps everywhere, formed part of the throng ; and this rowdy sub-stratum in the end gained possession of the field. They behaved,

to quote Wesley's own phraseology, "as if possessed by Moloch; clods and stones flew on every side." To add to the preacher's difficulties, when he had finished his discourse, he found that the driver of the coach by which he had come to the spot had driven away, and he was at a loss what to do. But a refuge was forthcoming. A lady invited him and his wife into her carriage, in which, we may say, there were six persons besides herself already. "There were nine of us," he writes, "in the coach; three on each side, and three in the middle. The mob closely attended us, throwing in at the window whatever came next to hand; but (he naively and with unconscious funniness adds) a large gentlewoman, who sat in my lap, screened me, so that nothing came near me." On arriving at his lodgings, his windows were smashed; and well on into the night, he and his host were more or less saluted with oaths, curses, stones, or brickbats. But we give the great revivalist's own account of the affair:—

"The mob," he says, "who were now increased to several thousands, when I stepped out of the

coach into Mr. A.'s house, perceiving I was escaped out of their hands, revenged themselves on the windows with many showers of stones, which they poured in, even into the rooms four stories high. Mr. A. walked through them to the Mayor's house, who gave them fair words, but no assistance, probably not knowing that he (the Mayor) might be compelled to make good all the damage which should be done. He then went in quest of constables, and brought two of them with him about nine o'clock. With their help he so thoroughly dispersed the mob, that no two of them were left together. But they rallied about twelve, and gave one charge more, with oaths and curses, and bricks and stones. After this all was calm, and I slept sound till near four in the morning."

Certainly a warm reception ; and it is not surprising that Wesley did not repeat his visit to the town again for seven years—until 1759. In the morning he departed for Beverley.

The house of Wesley's friend, Mr. A., it may interest the reader to know, stood in the Market Place, three doors from Mytongate, nearly opposite

the Cross Keys Inn.* The premises occupied at present by Mr. Dimbleby, tailor, answer to the description given. It is suggestive that this hostile demonstration should have occurred opposite the "Cross Keys,"† a sign connecting us with the pre-Reformation times of darkness and superstition. Rome had locked up religious truth with double keys, and kept the people in woeful ignorance during the Middle Ages. But even the darkness of the Papal domination was scarcely more deplorable than was, in many ways, the blindness and gross prejudice of early eighteenth century England against Wesley and his co-adjutors.

* Old M.S. account of Early Hull Methodism.

† The sign of this ancient inn is held to have an undoubted ecclesiastical significance, being associated with the jurisdiction which the Archbishop of York exercised here in pre-Reformation times. The Cross Keys stands adjacent to the formerly-existing house of the Black Friars.





CHAPTER II.

The Beginnings of the Society.



ALTHOUGH John Wesley's visit, in 1752, may be said to be the first historical landmark in Hull Methodism, we have to go several years back to chronicle its earliest beginnings. It was to a far less notable person it owed its introduction; to a good woman, altogether unknown to fame, but whose name, nevertheless, deserves to be rescued from oblivion.

There was in Grimsby a God-fearing family of the name of Blow, one member of which, William, might be called the "father" of the eighteenth century revival in that town. A relative of his, Elizabeth Blow, it was who brought Methodism to

Hull, about the year 1746, that is, seven years after the formation of the first Methodist Society in London, and four years subsequent to Mr. Wesley's earliest evangelical visit to West Yorkshire. This worthy sister, who had business occasionally to transact here, was accustomed to call upon a couple called Midforth, who dwelt somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Ropery—the present Humber Street. A true evangelist, desirous of imparting to others the Gospel tidings, she became instrumental in leading both husband and wife to a better and changed life. These two, so far as we can ascertain, were the first-fruits of Hull Methodism.

Gradually, however, a few others were added to their number. The Midforths were in turn constrained to become God's witnesses, and some of their neighbours began to evidence a desire to gather with them. Thus a small company was formed, whose wont it was to assemble together for reading, meditation, and prayer, the books used being the Bible, and homilies of the Church of England. In this way a little Methodist Society,

consisting of about seven or eight members, was originated several years before Mr. Wesley's earliest official visit.

This infant society met in the back Ropery, and the names of some of its members have come down to us. In addition to the Midforths, there was Mrs. Mary Thompson, a Mr. Norinan, a Mrs. Hird, and two or three others. This primitive band were not without their trials. Inoffensive as they were, nevertheless they provoked the hostility of a disreputable section of the populace. One evening, the house in which they were assembled was assaulted by a mob, and the persecuted company were kept prisoners until daybreak the next morning. Then at length many of the assailants withdrew, and the remnant was dispersed, halberd in hand, by the husband of one of the band, Sergeant Hird, who was either a constable, or a soldier at the garrison. The sergeant was justly indignant at the proceedings, and especially at the annoyance to which his own wife, as one of the company, had been exposed. In the end, matters reached such a point that the case of the Metho-



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MANOR ALLEY CHAPEL (1895).

dists was submitted to the local magistrates. The foolish plea was urged against them by their enemies that they were in league with rebels who favoured the Pretender, and that schemes of disloyalty were meditated at their private meetings. It is difficult for us to-day to attempt to realise in its fulness the gross ignorance and prejudice of the middle of the eighteenth century. But the Hull Methodists were honourably acquitted. The Bible and homilies used were brought before the Bench, and afforded evidence of the fallacy of the charge. The idea of treason was altogether set aside.

It was some time, however, before the company could enjoy continued peace. For some years, indeed, the Methodist movement made but comparatively small progress in our ancient seaport. Even for a considerable period after Mr. Wesley's visit, the cause remained insignificant ; it was essentially a day of small things. We have this on the authority of John Pawson, one of the early Methodist preachers, who lived in Hull as a youth for three years, 1752-5. He says, speaking of this time, "The light of the Gospel was well-

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nigh extinguished." Furthermore, he adds, "A Methodist was held in supreme contempt, as that name implied everything that was low, mean, and despicable in the opinion of the world."

Somewhat later, the little church removed from the Ropery to the Butchery, the north end of the present Queen Street. Probably it is this meeting-place to which Pawson, in an interesting reminiscence, refers. "When I was about eighteen years old," he tells us, "I fell in company with some people who had much conversation respecting the Methodists, against whom I was exceedingly prejudiced, believing them to be an ignorant, foolish, and wicked people: therefore I had not the least desire to be acquainted with them; nor had I so much curiosity as to wish to hear any of them preach, or to read any of their writings. One present strongly insisted that the Methodists in general were a very pious people, and as a proof of it, said that his wife was one of them, that she attended church twice every Lord's Day, and received the holy sacrament every Sunday; and that on this account they never cooked any-

thing on that sacred day. I thought, 'then she must be a good Christian, indeed,' as going constantly to church and sacrament included the whole of religion, as far as I knew. This gave me a more favourable opinion of the Methodists, and I felt a desire to hear some of them. Accordingly, one evening, when I supposed they had preaching, I went; but when I came to the door of that poor, obscure place in which they then preached in Hull, it occurred to my mind that I had never been in a dissenting meeting-house in my life; that I was a stranger to their way of worship; that I should not know when to kneel down, or when to stand up; and I should be ashamed. I therefore walked round the house, and returned home, and thought no more of the Methodists for several years." * And be it noted, Pawson, even during his Hull residence, was a seriously-minded youth, who went regularly to church, and met on Sunday evenings with a society of well-disposed people, in the vestry-room of High Church.

* *Life of Pawson.* "Early Methodist Preachers."

The Butchery meeting-place must have stood somewhere adjacent to the old Black Friars. This house of the Dominicans, or at least a portion of it, was still in existence at the period of which we are speaking. Founded about the year 1314, it flourished until the general suppression of religious houses by Henry VIII., an establishment of considerable importance and wealth. Thus what had been the precincts of the black-robed friars became the meeting place of our ardent early Methodists; matins and vespers being exchanged for fervent hymns and earnest prayers.

The truth of Pawson's statement, as to the numerical insignificance of the body, is practically confirmed by our father himself. Since he had preached on that April day outside the town walls, seven years had passed; yet he never again had been this way. But in 1759 he has a suggestive entry, to the effect that it was judged necessary he should go to Hull, "lest the little flock should be discouraged." Evidently it was only a struggling society.

And so for a second time he came hither—on

July 13th, 1759. Referring to Pocklington, where he had last preached, and drawing a comparison with the audience he had had there, he writes, "I had a far finer congregation at Hull; so for once the rich have the Gospel preached." The latter portion of the entry sounds somewhat curious; but if what Wilberforce said of Hull at a little later period was then true of it, "the rich" had need of the Gospel. Wilberforce, speaking of his youthful days, says, "Hull was then as gay a place as could be found outside of London. The theatre, balls, great suppers, and card parties were the delight of the principal families of the town."

On the whole, Mr. Wesley appears to have been well satisfied with his 1759 visit. He had one especially gratifying experience. In the evening of the day, his old friend Charles Delamotte, his fellow-labourer in Georgia, called upon him. For the benefit of those not thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances, just a word or two as to that episode in the life of Wesley. The attachment between himself and Delamotte was as

beautiful, as it was creditable to both. The latter was the son of a Middlesex magistrate, who, fired with enthusiasm for the cause in which his friend was bound to America, offered himself as a servant, so that he might but have a share in the work. His parents and relatives, extremely irate that he should go in such a menial capacity, at first altogether opposed the scheme. Eventually, partial consent was given, and the young man, crossing the Atlantic, played an honourable part in that now memorable missionary expedition. Later on he became a Moravian, and returning to England, settled down at Barrow, on the Lincolnshire side of the Humber. Strained as Wesley's relations became with certain of the Moravian brotherhood, the union of hearts existing between these two, supported (to use old Herrick's lines) by

Strength'ning buttresses,

Faith and affection, which will never slip,

remained unbroken, throughout the long lives of both. How pleased Wesley was to receive a visit from his friend across the river, on this

occasion, his diary testifies. "At night," he writes, "Charles Delamotte called upon me, and seemed to be the same loving, simple man still. I should not repent my journey to Hull, were it only for this short interview."

On this occasion Mr. Wesley stayed at the house of Mr. Thomas Snowden, who lived in High Street, the second door on the right from Scale Lane corner.* Thomas Snowden was one of the earliest class leaders and local preachers in this part of Yorkshire, and his wife (before her marriage, Sarah Teal) was the niece of Mrs. Mary Thompson, the third Hull Methodist. Concerning Mrs. Snowden, who survived until 1835, having nearly reached her hundredth year, an unique figure in local Methodism, we may have more to say anon. It was, in all probability, under her roof that Wesley enjoyed the interview with Delamotte.

Amongst the first preachers who visited this neighbourhood was one named Johnson, belonging to York, and another named Hampson. The

* That at least was Mr. Snowden's residence when Mr. Wesley stayed with him on subsequent occasions.— Old MS. account of early Hull Methodism.

premier local preacher here was Mr. Hetherington, a cabinet maker; and Sarah Teal was one of the seals of his ministry. During the earlier part of the "fifties," Hull was included in the Leeds Circuit, in which, as may be supposed from what we have stated, it was only an unimportant station. The Leeds Circuit then stretched over a very extensive area. It embraced "York and Sheffield, extending into Derbyshire on the south, to Hull on the east, and on the North as far as Newton under Rosebury Topping." At this period, therefore, it would only be at intervals any of the itinerants would come to Hull.

Later on in the decade, when the York Circuit was formed, our town was transferred to it. In 1759-60, as part of that Circuit, it shared the ministry of one of the most notable of Mr. Wesley's early preachers. We refer to Alexander Mather, one of the few pioneers who survived their venerable leader, who occupied the Presidential chair in 1792, and did very much in moulding the polity of the Methodist Church in the trying times which followed the death of its founder. With the after

life of Mather, who was called the great evangelist's "right hand man," we are not at present concerned, but a few words respecting his history at this point may not be out of place. Like many of Wesley's itinerants, he had passed through an eventful early career. A native of Scotland, he, whilst quite a lad, joined a party of Jacobites during the '45 rising. It thus came to pass that as a follower of the Pretender, he was present when the battle of Culloden was fought. After that luckless field for Prince Charles, young Sandie, with numbers of others, became a homeless fugitive. Even his own father would not receive him under his roof, for fear of bringing disaster upon himself and family. Eventually, the storm blew over, and after various adventures and escapes, of a more or less hair-breadth character, the lad got off scot free for the part he had played in the rebellion. Probably his misdemeanour was overlooked on account of his youth. Coming later on to England, while still a young man he joined Mr. Wesley's people, and in the end became one of his preachers. Previous to his local circuit,

he travelled in those of Epworth and Newcastle. He went to the former in 1757, and an item which he gives in his autobiography concerning this appointment throws a flood of light upon the lot of a Methodist preacher in those days. When appointed to Epworth, he did not start off by the stage coach, post-chaise, or even on horseback. No; he proceeded in a far more primitive fashion—he walked the one hundred and fifty miles which lay between London and his destination! Such was the stuff of which these early evangelists were made.

The connection of Mather with this town merits especial notice, inasmuch as the rising of the tide in Hull Methodism, the beginning of the days of prosperity, we think may fairly be dated from his ministry. Whatever views may be held on the “higher life,” or “Christian perfection,” as it is called to-day (the great or full salvation, as the old Methodists named it), the candid observer must admit this much, that wherever taught and consistently professed, a marked quickening of spiritual activity takes place. This is true of

all sections of the Christian church. Mather, amongst the early Methodists, was a consistent teacher of the doctrine, and in a statement which he made at Mr. Wesley's own request, concerning his "experience" as to the same, he says, "In 1759-60 many were made partakers of it in Hull and various other places." Doubtless it is to certain of these Wesley himself refers in 1761, when he tells us he had here "the comfort of finding some witnesses of the great salvation." We regard it, in the face of these facts, as more than a mere coincidence that in the "sixties" there was an evident upward move in Hull Methodism.

John Pawson was sent to the York itinerary in 1762, but he has left us no Hull experiences of this period. He, however, mentions Beverley, and not in a very creditable connection, singling it out for the especial opposition which he and the rest of the preachers met there. They were greatly disturbed by mobs at several places, he tells us, but particularly at Beverley. The circuit was still a very wide one, taking the

preachers, we learn from him, eight weeks to go through.

Another preacher worthy of note, who "travelled" in the circuit about this period, was Richard Boardman (1766-7). He was the first of two preachers who volunteered for America in 1769. A collection was made in Conference, out of which their passage money was paid, and £50 sent as a token of goodwill to the brethren in New York, who were in difficulties with their chapel. Boardman died in 1783.





CHAPTER III.

The Meeting House in Manor Alley.



MICHAEL DE LA POLE, Earl of Suffolk, the favourite and Lord Chancellor of Richard the Second, commenced the erection of a stately mansion in Hull, known in later times as Suffolk Palace, or the Manor House. This lordly dwelling, which stood on the west side of Lowgate, passed eventually, after the fall of the De la Poles, into the hands of the crown. Henry the Eighth had it repaired and enlarged, and resided in it during his visit to the town in 1540. During the later Stuart period a great part of the building was pulled down; the tower, or gateway, however, remained in existence until the middle of the last

century. And it was in this old tower, situate near the present Manor Alley, that at an early date the Hull Methodists assembled. It has been said it was here the *first* Methodists met; but, as we have already shewn, this was not their earliest meeting place. Prior to the followers of Wesley, a Baptist congregation used the self-same spot as a preaching house. These latter removed to their new chapel in Salthouse Lane in 1757; and it was then our people took possession.

The accommodation which the Manor House tower afforded was only limited. It might for a while suffice for the ordinary requirements of the infant society; but, as may be easily gathered from Wesley's Journals, it was not capable of meeting the demand for space made upon it on special occasions. Under the date of Tuesday, April 10th, 1764, he writes, recording a visit here, "I preached at five—two hours sooner than expected; by this means we had tolerable room for the greatest part of them that came." Again, Thursday, July 17th, 1766, "I preached before the time appointed at Hull, by which means the

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room was but moderately filled. It was near full at five in the morning." Five o'clock in the morning! Mark this, ye degenerate Methodists of these later days.

By this time, indeed, Methodism was beginning to assume a position of some importance in the town. In 1764 Mr. Wesley believed that "not many" in his numerous congregation "came in vain." In 1766 he was still encouraged; therefore it is not surprising to find that in 1771 Hull became a circuit town, the first recorded appointments being Joseph Thompson, J. Wesley, and Thomas Lee. It now was only fitting that the Hull Methodists should have a suitable sanctuary. Therefore, in 1771, the old tower meeting house was pulled down, and the still-existing Manor Alley chapel built in its stead. It bore the following inscription: "This preaching house was built by the people called Methodists, 1771, *pro bono publico*." Wesley, who preached in this latter place on various occasions, from 1772 to 1786, describes it as "extremely well finished, and upon

the whole one of the prettiest preaching houses in England."

The Manor Alley chapel, though only for a short while tenanted by our people, is not without its pleasing associations. It was here that "sweet singer," Benjamin Rhodes, ministered. By what untold thousands have his words been sung:—

My heart and voice I raise,
To spread Messiah's praise,
Messiah's praise let all repeat;

and by what numberless pilgrims on the road to the celestial city, his words of heavenward yearning:

• Jerusalem divine,
When shall I call thee mine,
And to thy holy hill attain?

But "to what base uses may we not return?"
The spot in Hull which has so often re-echoed
to his voice is now a Custom's bond warehouse!

Thomas Lee was another Manor Alley preacher worthy of remembrance. Our good Marvel writes:

'Tis a sure, but rugged way,
That leads to everlasting day.

Thomas Lee realized in his early career the truth of this, as concerned the "ruggedness," if ever did any of Wesley's evangelists: and some of



Photo by Mr. W. A. Hutton.

"TERRY'S" HOUSE, NEWLAND, WHERE JOHN WESLEY PREACHED.

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them had no mean experience in that direction. An account of the persecutions he suffered in different parts of the country, the reader may find in the "Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers." It was no mere unmeaning eulogy that Wesley bestowed upon his memory, when he described him, in the Minutes of the Conference for 1787, as "a faithful brother, and a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

Then there was Joseph Benson. It is a mistake to imagine that all the early Methodist itinerants were unlettered men. Benson had "kept terms" at Oxford, and was at one time classical master at Wesley's School at Kingswood. We may rest assured that an exact scholar like our "father" would not appoint an incompetent man for such a post as the latter. He was also associated with the Countess of Huntington some time, at her college at Trevecca. But more of Benson later.

The following local notices in Mr. Wesley's Journals belong to the period under consideration.

Thursday, July 7th, 1774. "I preached at
C

Beverley and Hull, where the house would not contain the congregation. How is that town changed since I preached on the Carr !”

Monday, May 12th, 1777, “I preached at Bridlington. Tuesday, 13th, in the morning at Beverley ; and in the evening at Hull, on ‘Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.’ And yet, blessed be God, there are thousands walking in it now who a few years since thought nothing about it.”

Thursday, July 1st, 1779. “This was the first of eighteen or twenty days fully as hot as any I remember in Georgia ; and yet the season is remarkably healthy. I preached at Beverley at noon, and at Hull in the evening” . . . And speaking of Georgia, it is interesting to come across another mention of his old friend Delamotte, whom he again met at Barrow, two or three years later, as he was coming to Hull.

Thursday, May 16th, 1782. “I preached in the new house at Barrow. I was well pleased to meet my old fellow traveller, Charles Delamotte, here. He gave me an invitation to lodge at his

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house, which I willingly accepted of. He seemed to be just the same as when we lodged together five and forty years ago ; only he complained of the infirmities of old age, which, through the mercy of God, I know nothing of. Hence I went to Hull."

Tuesday, June 22nd, 1784. " At one I preached to a large and remarkably serious congregation at Beverley ; about six at Hull. Afterwards I met the Society, and strongly exhorted them to press forward to the mark of their high calling."

We can picture the congregation of the Manor Alley days—the men on one side of the chapel, the women on the other ; the males attired in sober garb, knee breeches and coarse worsted stockings ; the better class hearers with silver-buckled shoes and bob-wigs ; the females in equally plain apparel—for no flaunty finery was then allowed in the Methodist meeting house. Then we may suppose there would be no closed pews ; all the seats free and unallotted. Good John could not tolerate the idea of persons claiming pews of their own in the house of God. And what a flutter and

excitement there was on those special occasions when the great unmitred bishop visited the flock!

Although Wesley has now been in his grave for more than a century, it is not so very long since there were living those who could bear testimony as to the sensation which one of his visits caused in the town. A friend tells the writer how that his mother, when a girl, though living away in Lincolnshire, had to come specially home to Hull to be present on such an auspicious occasion as one of these visitations. An aunt of his too, now some years dead, also distinctly remembered, as a child, being held on her father's shoulder to hear and see Mr. Wesley. Again, General Perronet Thompson (well known in connection with the Free Trade agitation), who was born in Hull at the house now numbered 18 Lowgate, and died at an advanced age as recently as 1869, has also left some interesting reminiscences of the famous evangelist, referring to the same period. In a letter written in 1865 (for copy of which we are indebted to Mr. Walter Brown, Savile Street), he says: "I distinctly

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remember Mr. Wesley preaching on the grass plot of Mr. Terry's house at Newland, and could almost point out the place of the preacher. The year I cannot assign, but it is very likely to have been 1789. I was so young that I remember I was allowed to wander away from the preaching, and botanise in the environs. I suppose I was about ten years old. . . . I remember hearing Mr. Wesley twice more, probably about the same time. Once, my impression is, in the old meeting house in Manor Alley; and once I was taken to Beverley. . . . Of the personal appearance of the preacher I have a considerably strong impression, but not of the matter. His manner, I recollect, was calm."

The house referred to as "Mr. Terry's" is that which still stands at the corner of the Beverley and Stoneferry Roads, nearly opposite the Newland Church of to-day. General Thompson says it was very likely in 1789, but we think it may probably have been earlier. In 1786 Wesley specially records having preached at Newland. We give an extract from his Journal, dated Saturday, June

17th, of that year: "I preached about four at Newland, and at seven in Hull. Sunday, 18th, I was invited by the Vicar to preach in the High Church, one of the largest parish churches in England. Preached on the Gospel for the day, the story of Dives and Lazarus. Being invited in the afternoon, the Church was, if possible, more crowded than before, and I pressed home the prophet's words, 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while he is near.' Who would have expected a few years since to see me preaching in the High Church at Hull?"

The father of the general above referred to, Thomas Thompson, F.S.A., the author of some valuable local historical works, and three times M.P. for Midhurst, was long and honourably associated with the Methodists, his name for a number of years appearing on the list of those elected by Conference to protect the privileges and rights of the body. We are indebted to him for a very interesting account of the first Methodist missionary meeting ever held, viz., at Leeds, during the Conference of 1778, at which he was present. The

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son of a small Holderness farmer, he entered the employ of the Wilberforce family, and ultimately became a banker himself, one of the founders of the firm now known as Samuel Smith Brothers and Co. The story of his life affords one amongst the many illustrations of the social elevating power of Methodism. His son Perronet was named after his mother's family, she being the grand-daughter of Vincent Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, one of Wesley's early friends and sympathisers.

We have already spoken of the Snowdens, who entertained Mr. Wesley in 1759. It was under their roof also he sojourned on a number of later visits; there not only he, but others likewise of the early preachers, found a happy home whilst they remained in the town. Mr. Snowden died 1795, but his widow survived until forty years subsequently, having long outlived all her earlier contemporaries. What we know of the primitive days of Hull Methodism we greatly owe to her, her reminiscences affording quite a treasury of Methodist tradition. Thomas Snowden preached on many occasions in the Manor Alley Chapel.

Previous to the coming of Joseph Benson, the congregation in Manor Alley had not generally exceeded the number of two hundred. In 1787, the members of the society in the Hull Circuit, which then included Beverley and Patrington, did not exceed five hundred and eighty. But Benson had not long been in the town before a wonderful advance was marked; he had not spent a month in Hull ere the chapel began to be crowded to excess. The society and congregation so increased as to render the erection of a larger chapel absolutely necessary. The quarterly contributions in the classes, which at Midsummer 1786 were only £5 0s. 7d., at Lady-day, 1788, had increased to £8 1s. 1d.

The period of which we are speaking was an important one in local history. It witnessed what may be termed the transition from mediæval to modern Hull. It was in 1774 that the Hull Dock Company obtained their first charter, and had granted to them the walls, ramparts, and ditches on the north and west of the town, for the carrying out of their proposed works. The cutting

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of the Old Dock would bring hither a crowd of labourers and others, the very social material Methodism was wont to lay hold upon in those days. Doubtless the influx of these, and the growing trade of the port generally, would act as important side influences affecting the growth of the cause, combined with the vigorous ministry of Benson. And now, about 1786, it was decided to build a larger and more commodious meeting-house close by, and the outcome of the scheme was the erection of George Yard Chapel.

During the Manor Alley period, after Pocklington was separated from the Hull Circuit, there were two Methodist preachers resident in the town. The one, Joseph Benson, for instance, living in the square at the top of the alley, his colleague in Todd's Entry, Silver Street. One preached at Hull, the other at Beverley and Hull Bridge; the two taking it in turns on alternate Sundays.



CHAPTER IV.

George Yard and Wesley's Last Visits.



GEORGE YARD, a name that has been a household word with Hull Methodists for a century, is a spot not wanting in still earlier associations. Tradition has it that in pre-Reformation days there here stood an inn, much frequented by pilgrims proceeding to the famous shrine of St. John of Beverley. From this mediæval St. George and the Dragon, of which we may suppose the modern George Yard to have been the courtyard, we can imagine them setting out for the minster town on May mornings, as Chaucer's immortal pilgrims journeyed from the Tabard in Southwark. Not in dark, sombre mood; but jovial, lightsome,

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and merry. That is if there is any truth in the legend. Whether there is or not, we will not venture to decide. Certain it is, the houses with overhanging stories at the High Street end of the thoroughfare, with part of which line of buildings the hostelry has been identified, are themselves of great antiquity. The low roofed rooms of the two old taverns, which form a portion of the block, would afford charming interiors for an Ostade or a Teniers. (We speak merely from an artistic point of view; we are not here considering other issues).*

But to come down to later times, George Yard Chapel, which directly connects us with John Wesley's days, stands adjacent to, if not actually on the spot where a theatre once stood, managed by Tate Wilkinson, a somewhat famous eighteenth century actor. The old theatre itself, on whose boards many of the most notable of

* This is an extremely interesting bit of old Hull. In addition to the buildings above named, we have close by the ancient Quakers' house where Penn is said to have stayed. Then there is Wilberforce's birthplace just across the way, in which same dwelling also Sir John Lister probably entertained Charles the First.

last century actors were wont to appear, after Wilkinson left it, seems for some time to have been used for a dissenting place of worship. In Wilkinson's Memoirs, published in 1790, he writes, "The Rev. Robert Rutherford erected his pulpit on the spot where Brutus had been in his pulpit also, the pit he (Rutherford) converted into pews, and the stage and side boxes were appropriated to the beaux and belles." We would observe, however, that this congregation must not be associated with the Wesleyans, as no such name as Rutherford appears in the list of preachers for Hull at this time. He was really a Baptist minister, who had had a rupture with the Salt-house Lane church, and this was one of his later undertakings. We think it as well to make this explanation, as the reader may find the local historians somewhat misleading on the point.

The "new" chapel as it was called, erected by the Hull Methodists in George Yard in 1787, was in its day considered a wonderful structure. It was regarded as a sort of Methodist minster. Whilst the chapel was being built, many predicted

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it would never be filled; but such was the influx of strangers, and such the interest excited in the town, that when it was opened hundreds were unable to obtain admission to the first service. We know of one who walked from York to Hull to be present at the dedication. Joseph Benson preached the opening sermon on the appropriate text, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of Hosts, and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts." Haggai, ii., 9. The sermon, which was printed at the time, has since been reprinted, and may be read by the curious. Referring to the Manor Alley chapel he said, "Your last house was not without its glory. . . . But though the former house was glorious, excuse me, if I this day express hope that this latter house may exceed in glory. . . . I find myself secretly checked by a fear lest as your congregations increase, and you grow more into repute in the neighbourhood, the spirit of the world should increase, and mar your rising glory. For while the greater commodiousness, not to say neatness

and beauty of this lovely place invites more of the rich and gay to associate with you in your worship, there is danger lest this do you hurt, cause your fine gold to become dim, and intermix your wine with water."

It is needless to say the Hull society and preachers were alike immensely proud of the structure; Benson like the rest being extremely elated with it. So effusive did the latter become in his enlargement upon its beauties in an account of the opening which he wrote Mr. Wesley, that he somewhat aroused the ire of good John. Our "father" had also his "pet" chape (City Road) as well as Benson, and he could not tolerate the idea of any other place being put on a level with it. Hence the following laconic letter which he sent in reply: "Dear Joseph,—I greatly rejoice in the erection of your new preaching-house, and in the tokens of the Divine presence with which you and the people were favoured at the opening; but if it be at all equal to the new chapel in London, I will engage to eat it.—I am, yours affectionately, JOHN WESLEY."

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When, however, Mr. Wesley visited George Yard in 1788, even he himself had to admit that it was nearly as large as City Road. Furthermore, that it "was well built and elegantly finished—handsome, but not gaudy."

We give his account of that visit. Friday, 20th June, 1788. "I went to Hull, and in the evening explained and applied those remarkable words of our Lord, "Whosoever doeth the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother." Saturday, 21st. "We had a large congregation at five, larger than even that of Birmingham, which exceeded all the morning congregations I had then seen." Sunday, 22nd. "Mr. Clark, the vicar, inviting me to preach in the High Church, I explained (what occurred in the service of the day) what it is to build our house upon the rock, and applied it as strongly as I could. I dined at the vicarage with Mr. Clark, a friendly, sensible man, and I believe truly fearing God. And such by the peculiar providence of God are all the three stated ministers in Hull. He said he never saw the church so full

before. However, it was still fuller in the afternoon, when at the desire of Mr. Clark I preached on St. James' beautiful account of the wisdom which is from above. At six in the evening I preached in our own house to as many as could get in (but abundance of people went away) on Gal. vi., 14."

This was Wesley's last journey but one to Hull. By this time, it is needless to inform the reader, he was no longer the persecuted and maligned personage of earlier days. He was, on the contrary, courted and honourably received in all quarters. As Joseph Milner, the estimable master of the Hull Grammar School once remarked, "Mr. Wesley had lived to see even his enemies at peace with him." A never to be forgotten sight must those vast congregations in Holy Trinity have been.

Benson was succeeded as superintendent, or assistant, as it was then called (i.e., Mr. Wesley's assistant), by Thomas Taylor, a familiar name to students of Methodist history. Taylor was one, who in his earlier days, as has been said,



Photo by Mr. W. C. Oulton

TUDOR HOUSES EAST ENTRANCE GEORGE YARD.

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had "traversed mountains, forded rivers, and plunged through bogs, with an empty purse and an empty stomach, seeking to save sinners with a zeal and spiritual self-denial, worthy of the noblest missionary that ever lived." It was during his local ministry our father's last visit took place.

Wesley writes: Friday, June 25th, 1790. "About noon I preached at Beverley to a serious, well-behaved congregation; and in the evening to one equally serious, and far more numerous at Hull. Saturday, 26th, was a day of satisfaction. I preached at seven in the morning and seven in the evening to as many as our house would contain, the ground being too wet for the congregation to stand abroad." . . . As Tyerman remarks, this is a simple entry, and it gives no idea of the commotion created by the visit. Taylor gives an equally laconic and inadequate account. He writes in his diary, "I and many friends from Hull met Mr. Wesley at Beverley. We dined at an inn. He preached, and we hastened to Hull. Many people attending this evening."

But we have another narrative of the occasion, which is probably the one to which General Thompson refers, as to when he heard Mr. Wesley at Beverley, furnishing details lacking in both the records just quoted. From this account* we learn that the "many friends" were a regular cavalcade of forty persons, some in chaises, the others on horses. All these dined with Mr. Wesley at his inn at Beverley. The company were having a good time of it with brisk conversation, when in the midst of it all, Mr. Wesley pulled out his watch, and started on his feet. Then bidding his friends good day he slipped into his carriage, and was gone before they had time to remonstrate with him, or wish him wait for the company. Horses forthwith were saddled, and carriages got ready with as much speed as possible, but by this time the old man was well on his way, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that the cavalcade overtook their aged father in sufficient time to do him public honour in the sight of their

* Vide Memoir of Joseph Gee, *Methodist Magazine*, 1836. Page 494.

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fellow townsmen; Mr. Wesley himself being considerably amused when he learned of the excitement of which his punctuality had been the cause.

This characteristic narrative reminds one very much of what Dr. Johnson, who had a genuine respect for his famous contemporary, once remarked in Boswell's hearing, "John Wesley's conversation," he said, "is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs, and have out his talk, as I do." The pompous old Samuel dearly loved a talk, and not only was he a brilliant conversationalist himself, but he knew and valued another master of the art when he met one. He said of Wesley on another occasion, "He can talk well on any subject."

It was during this last sojourn in our town that Wesley addressed the letter to a bishop given by Moore. We have not the name of the bishop, but the epistle is a very characteristic one, quite a masterpiece in its way, of formal respect, mingled with caustic, plain speaking; and it well illustrates

the attitude of the writer towards the Establishment in his closing days. Clearly, despite his years, Wesley's pen had not lost its cunning. It is as follows :

“ HULL, June 26th, 1790.

“ My Lord,

“It may seem strange that one, who is not acquainted with your lordship, should trouble you with a letter ; but I am constrained to do it. I believe it is my duty both to God and your lordship. I must speak plain ; having nothing to hope or fear in this world, which I am on the point of leaving.

“The Methodists in general, my lord, are members of the Church of England. They hold all her doctrines, attend her services, and partake of her sacraments. They do not willingly do harm to anyone, but do what good they can to all. To encourage each other herein, they frequently spend an hour together in prayer and mutual exhortation. Permit me then to ask *Cui bono*, for what reasonable end would your lordship drive these people out of the Church? Are they not as quiet, inoffensive, nay, as pious

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as many of their neighbours? except perhaps here and there a hairbrained man who knows not what he is about. Do you ask 'who drives them out of the Church?' Your lordship does, and that in the most cruel manner, yea, and in the most disingenuous manner. They desire a license to worship God after their own conscience. Your lordship refuses it; and then punishes them for not having a license. So your lordship leaves them only this alternative, 'leave the Church or starve.' And is it a Christian, yea, a Protestant bishop that so persecutes his own flock? I say persecutes, for it is persecution to all intents and purposes. You do not burn them, indeed, but you starve them; and how small is the difference? And your lordship does this under colour of a vile, execrable law, not a whit better than that *de hæretico comburendo*. So persecution which is banished out of France, is again countenanced in England.

"O my lord, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for pity's sake, suffer the poor people to enjoy their religious as well as civil liberty. I am on

the brink of eternity ; perhaps so is your lordship too. How soon may you also be called to give a record of your stewardship to the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. May he enable both you and me to do it with joy. So prays, my lord, your lordship's dutiful son and servant,

JOHN WESLEY."

Although, as in Hull, John Wesley had numerous friends and sympathisers amongst the clergy in all parts of the country; nevertheless, the Established Church had its own narrowness and intolerance, and not the intent of the great evangelist to thank for the fact that the Methodists became Dissenters. Had the Church of England possessed anything like the wisdom and foresight of the Church of Rome, it would never have allowed such a body of fellow believers, holding alike practically all the fundamentals of faith, thus to depart from its communion. The enthusiasm of the Methodists would have been turned to good account. Much as the Church might have been disposed to smile at their zeal, they

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would have been allowed to become the Franciscans or Dominicans of Episcopacy. But alas for the Church of England, it was not wise in its day and generation. Already, indeed, when this letter was written it was too late; crass stupidity had done its work.* The Rubicon had already been crossed, and despite whatever the aged leader might say, return was impossible. The large proportion of his followers might still be associated with the Episcopacy, but the possibility of future Methodists remaining so, was becoming more and more remote. Wesley in this matter was very much like the fisherman in the "Arabian Nights," who found the box on the seashore in which was imprisoned a mighty genie. Whilst imprisoned the spirit appeared insignificant enough, but when the good man was prevailed upon to release it,

* Mr. Wesley himself admitted his utter inability to keep his people Episcopalian, in face of the intolerance with which they were in some places regarded. He has an entry in his *Journal*, Scarbro', June 20th, 1784, which is to the point. He writes, "The new vicar shewed plainly why he refused those who desired the liberty for me to preach in his church. A keener sermon I never heard. So all I have done to persuade the people to attend the church is overturned at once. And all who preach thus will drive the Methodists from the church in spite of all that I can do."

then forthwith its real character became manifest. Instead of a thing of no account, a veritable giant came forth, whose Brobdingnagian proportions altogether bewildered the perplexed beholder. So (to divest the legend of all sinister application) like the genie of the story, the very Methodism which under divine guidance John Wesley had himself called forth, had already passed more or less beyond his control.

In Hull, Mr. Wesley saw his last birthday, which he thus chronicles in his diary, "Monday 28th. This day I enter my eighty-eighth year. For above eighty-six years I found none of the infirmities of old age; my eyes did not wax dim, neither was my natural strength abated; but last August I found almost a sudden change. My eyes were so dim that no glasses would help me, my strength quite forsook me, and probably will not return in this world. But I feel no pain from head to foot; only it seems nature is exhausted, and humanly speaking, will sink more and more till

The weary springs of life stand still at last."

Yes, the long and busy life was drawing

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towards its close; still, though eventide was fast falling upon his earthly day, he ceased not to labor, indeed he lived but to do his Master's work. A letter written to Thomas Taylor in Hull, within two months of his decease, illustrates the minute interest which even to the very end he continued to take in his preachers, and the thousand and one details connected with the various societies scattered up and down the country. Note the words, "I hope I shall not live to be useless." No cry of *vanitas vanitatum* there. When death came it would be no enemy, the day's work was done; rather it was "Death the Friend," of the German artist. He could ask with quaint Francis Quarles:

Why should we not as well desire death
As sleep?
'Tis all but a releasing
Our tired limbs.

The following is the letter to Taylor:

"LONDON, January 6th, 1791.

"Dear Tommy,

"With regard to the powerful workings of the spirit, I think those words of our Lord are chiefly

to be understood: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof (thou art sure of the fact), but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.'

"Make your yearly subscription when you see best, only take care it does not interfere with any other subscription. The tract of Archbishop King has been particularly admired by many people of excellent sense. I do not admire it as much as they do, but I like it well. Yet I have corrected a far better tract on the same subject, perhaps the last I shall have to publish. Indeed I hope I shall not live to be useless. I wish you and yours many happy years.

And am, Dear Tommy, etc.,

JOHN WESLEY."





CHAPTER V.

George Yard, 1791-1800.



R. WESLEY died on March 2nd, 1791. Henceforth his familiar form was to be seen no more on the Yorkshire highways. For fifty years he had traversed his wide parish. He had ambled leisurely along green lanes in spring and summer; or forced his way across bleak moors and commons, against the biting blasts of winter. Now conning some old favorite classic; or reading with keen criticism some new book which was claiming the attention of the literary world. At other times composing a hymn as he rode along; or else

pondering over a sermon to be delivered at his next preaching station. But his journeyings were now all at an end.

The last letter that Wesley ever wrote, penned within a week of his decease, it is interesting to note, was to our townsman Wilberforce, regarding the slave trade. Of that infamous traffic he had the utmost abhorrence. As early as 1774 he had published his "Thoughts on Slavery," and he had never ceased to regard the trade in human flesh and blood with other than the most uncompromising hatred. Hence the delight with which he hailed the abolition movement. Wesley had already borne the burden and heat of the day in well-doing, whilst Wilberforce was only yet a young man, with his great life's work practically before him. And it was a great fight. Wesley had only been gathered five years to his fathers when the emancipation struggle openly began. Wilberforce was himself an old man by the time that the battle was won; indeed, he had passed away from this earthly scene before the work

was fully consummated. The letter to Wilberforce ran thus :

“ LONDON, February 24th, 1791.

“ My Dear Sir,

“ Unless the divine providence has raised you up to be as *Athanasius contra mundum*, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for the very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils ; but if God be for you, who can be against you ? Are all of them together stronger than God ? O, be not weary in well doing. Go on in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it.

“ Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress ; it being a law in our colonies

that the ~~birth~~ of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this! That He who has guided you from your youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of,

Dear Sir,

Your affectionate servant,

JOHN WESLEY."

On the occasion of Mr. Wesley's death, Thomas Taylor preached a special sermon at George Yard. It was a memorable day. The preacher tells us he had a crowded audience, far more than the chapel would hold; but as he himself remarks, it was not to be wondered at, adding, "I suppose that was the case in every place where a funeral sermon was preached on the occasion, which I apprehend was all over the three kingdoms." Taylor's reminiscences throw interesting side lights upon local conditions at that period (1789-91). Referring to Holderness, which then formed part of the Hull circuit, he describes it as a "large tract of low marshy country, with large canals cut in different directions" in order to drain it.

His description of that now fertile seignior, reminds us by reason of its similarity, of Chaucer's words written four centuries earlier :

“Lordings there is, in Yorkshire I guess,
A marsh country called Holderness.”

Again, the account which he gives of an adventure on the Humber, on his return from the Bristol Conference, indicates what a different matter travelling was in those days as compared with the present time. Fancy a traveller journeying by a small boat from Thorne to Hull, as he informs us he did, thereby “hoping to save time and expense.” Speaking of Holderness, we may further add that Mr. Thomas Thompson, the banker, spent some of his best energy in the evangelising of this area, he being, as already stated, a native of the district. He had to carry on the work under no mean discouragements, for not only were the people dark, ignorant, and superstitious, but his efforts aroused the enmity of the ruder sort, and he was often pelted, or treated with other forms of opposition.

From Taylor we learn something of the unrest

and disquietude which occurred in the connexion following the death of its founder. He writes, "It was thought great changes would take place after his (Mr. Wesley's) death, and various things were prophesied by people of warm imaginations. We had some little stir, I believe, chiefly through a printed circular which was issued from Hull. I suppose it originated from some persons who professed to be warm advocates for the Church, and persuaded others to sign it. The document was sent to every circuit in the kingdom, and called back an echo from many circuits, so that it was thought there would be a division at the conference." There are some men who make "much ado about nothing," but we cannot say Taylor was of this class; in brevity of statement he appears to us to err in quite the opposite direction.

Really the "little stir" to which he refers was a matter of the greatest moment. It involved the whole question as to what was to be the character of future Methodism; whether it was to be a mere auxiliary agency in connection with the Established Church, or on the other hand,



Photo by Mr. W. A. Jones.

GEORGE YARD AND CHAPEL.

an independent communion, with fully recognised and accredited ministers of its own. The circular, which was dated Hull, May 14th, 1791, prophesied that if once Methodism seceded from the Church of England it would “dwindle away into a dry, dull, separate part.” It advocated what was asserted to be the wish of their lately deceased founder, namely, that the sacraments should only be administered by clergymen of the Episcopacy, and that none other should be recognised as ordained ministers. But the fact was—if we may credit reliable authorities—Mr. Wesley in his closing days had already gone beyond this point; and it was scarcely to be expected that a large section of his followers, bound down by no such traditions or associations as he had been, were going to retrograde.* However, the points raised by the Hull circular caused great commotion throughout the connexion, and it was some years before matters were finally adjusted. This Church

*In the life of Wesley by Coke and Moore (1792), it is distinctly stated that Mr. Wesley ordained ministers for England, in addition to those for Scotland and America. Smith in his history of Methodism gives the names of these as Mather, Rankin, and Moore.

party were also in favor of having no worship at George Yard, at the hour when the Established Church was holding their services. In 1791 a number subscribed their names to a document agreeing to the chapel being closed during Church service, "*as being in accord with Mr. Wesley's wishes.*" But of course the other party in the end gained the day.

Perhaps, however, it is not generally known that the lessons for the Lord's Day, appointed to be read in our Wesleyan chapels, are still taken from the Church of England calendar, and that this arrangement has a connection with the controversy to which we have just referred. According to the Plan of Pacification, after the secession of 1797, when the New Connexion was formed, it was agreed as follows, between Conference and those societies which remained loyal to the parent body: That "whenever divine service is performed in England in Church hours, the officiating preacher shall read either the service of the Established Church, our venerable father's abridgment, or *at least the lessons appointed by the calendar.*" And

from that time to the present day, the Sunday lessons have been appointed according to the Plan of Pacification.

The following early list of George Yard Trustees (1794), may be interesting to our readers; some of the names, the Goods and the Gees for instance, being still represented in local Methodism.

WILLIAM KELSEY.	JOHN DAWSON.
JOHN HARROP.	GEORGE MELLS.
THOMAS GOOD.	WILLIAM OMBLER.
SAMUEL HOLDSWORTH.	HENRY GREEN.
WILLIAM WEBSTER.	RICHARD WADE.
WILLIAM SISSISON.	JOHN HARE.
WILLIAM HEADLEY.	JOSEPH COCKERELL.
JOS. GEE.	WILLIAM RAMSDEN.
GEORGE WILSON.	THOMAS THOMPSON.

Thomas Taylor was succeeded as superintendent minister by Alexander Mather (1791-4), and he in turn by James Wood (1794-7). The latter was one of Mr. Wesley's later preachers who came quite to the front in the connexion whilst yet a young man. As a proof of the estimation in which he was held by our founder, it may be

stated that his name appears in the Deed of Declaration, although then only in the eleventh year of his ministry.

1793 and 1794 were years of prosperity, the membership of the Hull circuit having been doubled, increasing from 640 to 1280. It was in 1793 that Scott Street Chapel was erected. Jonathan Brown, one of the ministers at this time, and the colleague of both Mather and Wood, was a very successful preacher. He was regarded highly by Mr. Wesley. The latter being in the Isle of Man in the summer of 1781, was requested by a godly woman there, to send two suitable preachers; "men," she added, "who can endure hardships and privations"—the Isle of Man was not in those days a pleasant holiday resort. "Well sister," was the reply, "I will send two men, who, if you give them anything to eat will thank you, and if you give them nothing to eat will thank you." One of those sent was Jonathan Brown. He was admitted as preacher in 1778, and died in Hull, a supernumary, in 1825; being interred at Waltham

Street. "Let me be buried in the Waltham Street Chapel, and in a plain way like Mr. Wesley," was his request regarding his funeral.

Joseph Benson was again superintendent, for the second time (1797-1800). His public labours were held in the highest estimation ; members of the local clergy, it is stated, were frequently to be found in his congregation. Amongst the Episcopal clergy at this time with strong evangelical sympathies, the Rev. Thos. Dykes, of St. John's Church, deserves especial mention. During Benson's second superintendency a very remarkable revival took place at George Yard, under the preaching of Robert Lomas. Both Mather and Benson were elected to the presidential chair whilst stationed in Hull.

The years 1797-8 are remarkable in the history of Methodism as marking the first separation from the parent body. There was a secession of a number of ministers and some thousands of members, on the grounds of certain alleged defects in church polity, and thus was formed the New Connexion. Viewed dispassionately in

the light of to-day, this separation cannot but be the subject of profound regret; the questions at issue between the two sections being of such relatively small importance compared with the loss to both parties. The Hull circuit suffered its share in the disruption.

Joseph Entwisle, one of the preachers in 1800, became in after years President of the Conference. His Methodist beginnings were humble enough. When Mr. Wesley sent him and Richard Reece to Oxford, their home was a garret in the house of a journeyman shoemaker, for which the society paid sixpence per week. This chamber had to serve them for dining, sitting, and bedroom, together with study all in one. Reece (who lived until 1850), a most interesting survival of eighteenth century Methodism, it is worth noting in this connection, was the first superintendent of the Waltham Street Circuit. A man of tall, commanding presence; it was not difficult to believe the lineage ascribed to him in Sir J. E. Burke's "Royal Descents of England," the descendant of a line of kings. Doubtless the name was

originally Rhys. "Father" Reece was the last minister in the connexion to keep up the private bands, and the five o'clock morning service. It is perhaps needless to state he did not find it easy to infuse his own enthusiasm for the latter institution into the minds of a younger generation. "Mr. Waddy," he said to S. D. Waddy on one occasion, "If you would attend the five o'clock preaching every morning, it would lengthen your days." "Of course it would, sir," replied the witty junior, "but then it would proportionately shorten my nights."

But we must not be led away into Waltham Street reminiscences.

* * * * *

Thus then, we have briefly sketched the history of Hull Methodism to the close of the eighteenth century. It is not our present purpose to follow it further; but we cannot conclude without making some reference to the advances made since then. In 1797 there were only three Methodist preachers in the town, whilst to-day there are about thirty-five ministers of the various sections of Methodism,

and some forty chapels and mission halls. Hull itself has during the present century spread immensely. It is not easy to realise that Waltham Street Chapel, which now stands in so densely populated an area, when erected in 1813, occupied a position similar to the Brunswick or St. George's Road chapels of to-day. Yet such was the case. In Bower's map of 1791, Waltham Street was not yet named, the site of that now time-honoured sanctuary being marked by a large bowling-green, the existence of which is still borne witness to by the narrow thoroughfare leading to Bond Street that bears its name.*

This bowling-green, which had some pleasure gardens adjoining, one nonagenarian member of the Waltham Street congregation still surviving, remembers perfectly well.

In 1801, the town had only between twenty and thirty thousand inhabitants, and Drypool and Sculcoates were practically small distinct villages. Very different from the Hull of to-day

*The street obtains its name from a certain Mr. Waltham, who had a mill in the vicinity.

with its population of more than two hundred thousand ; and let us trust in manners and morals changed somewhat for the better since that period of Napoleon's wars and the press gangs. For viewed from certain aspects, those days when George the Third was king were wild and lawless enough. Not to speak of the deeds of violence perpetrated by the nefarious press gangs ; let the fact that a man offered his wife for sale in our Market Place on February 14th, 1806, and sold her for twenty guineas, delivering her over with a halter round her, serve as an illustration of the manners and customs of those good old times. Referring to this incident a local journal somewhat naïvely remarked, " From their frequency of late years the common people have imbibed an opinion that the proceedings are strictly legal and binding by law." Such was the England that Crabbe and Morland portrayed by poem and picture ; and which Gillray and Rowlandson so broadly caricatured.



List of Hull Methodist Ministers, 1771-1800.

(In 1771 Hull became a Circuit town.)

1771, JOSEPH THOMPSON, JOHN WESLEY,
THOMAS LEE.

1772, WILLIAM HUNTER, LANCELOT HARRISON,
MICHAEL FENWICK.

1773, BENJAMIN RHODES, GEORGE WADSWORTH,
ROBERT EMPRINGHAM.

1774, BENJAMIN RHODES, DAVID EVANS,
JOHN LEECH.

(Scarbro' separated from Hull circuit 1775).

1775, WILLIAM HUNTER, WILLIAM BARKER.

1776, GEORGE STORY, WILLIAM DUFTON.

1777, THOMAS HANSON, JAMES HUDSON.

1778, CHRISTOPHER WATKINS, JOHN BEANLAND.

1779, ISAAC BROWN, JOHN BEANLAND.

1780, LANCELOT HARRISON, WILLIAM PERCIVAL.

- 1781, LANCELOT HARRISON, WILLIAM DUFTON,
SAMUEL HODGSON.
- 1782, JOSEPH THOMPSON, NICHOLAS MANNERS,
EDWARD JACKSON.
- 1783, EDWARD JACKSON, BARNABAS THOMAS,
ROBERT JACKSON.
- 1784, JEREMIAH ROBERTSHAW, WILLIAM THOM,
GEORGE HOLDER.
- 1785, PETER MILL, WILLIAM THOM, WILLIAM FISH.
(Pocklington circuit formed 1786).
- 1786, JOSEPH BENSON, JOHN BARBER.
- 1787, JOSEPH BENSON, THOMAS BARTHOLOMEW.
- 1788, JOSEPH BENSON, JONATHAN EDMONDSON.
- 1789, THOMAS TAYLOR, WILLIAM SIMPSON.
- 1790, THOMAS TAYLOR, JOHN SHAW.
- 1791, ALEXANDER MATHER, JOHN SHAW.
- 1792, ALEXANDER MATHER (President),
ROBERT HOPKINS.
- 1793, ALEXANDER MATHER, JONATHAN BROWN,
JOHN GRANT.
- 1794, JAMES WOOD, JONATHAN BROWN,
WILLIAM MARTIN.
- 1795, JAMES WOOD, WILLIAM PERCIVAL,
JOHN STAMP.

1796, JAMES WOOD, WILLIAM PERCIVAL,
JOSEPH COLE.

1797, JOSEPH BENSON, JOHN STAMP, JOHN FOSTER.

1798, JOSEPH BENSON (President), ROBERT LOMAS.

1799, JOSEPH BENSON, JOSEPH SUTCLIFFE.

1800, JOSEPH BLAGBORNE, JOSEPH ENTWISLE,
GEORGE SMITH.



Authorities consulted.

Amongst others, the following :

1746-1770—Wesley's Journals.

MS. Account of Early Hull Methodism.

Memoir of Mary Snowden, *Methodist Magazine*, 1837, pages 885, &c.

Mrs. Snowden was the niece of Mary Thompson, the THIRD Hull Methodist, and died in 1835, in her 100th year.

John Pawson's life (by himself).

Pawson, afterwards one of Mr. Wesley's preachers, spent three years in Hull as a youth, circa 1752-5.

Life of Alexander Mather.

1771-1800—Wesley's Journals.

Tyerman's Life of Wesley.

Memoir of Joseph Gee, *Methodist Magazine*, 1836, pages 494, &c.

Autobiography of Thomas Taylor.

Letter written by General Perronet Thompson to Mr. Sheahan, the local annalist, giving his memories of Wesley, now in the possession of Mr. Walter Brown, Savile-street.

We are also indebted to Mr. John Watkinson, of Crystal Street, for family reminiscences of Wesley.

Mr. Watkinson's grandfather was a singer in the choir at George Yard in its opening days, and both his mother and aunt remembered Mr. Wesley.

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